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AUTHOR Pfaffenroth, Sara B.
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ABSTRACT

In response to the absence of a national policy in the United States for guiding the influx of international students, a model self-study process was created to guide community colleges in developing such a policy. The model is designed to help colleges consider issues related to the economics of educating foreign students, the socio-organizational issues of students on U.S. campuses, and educational issues. Specific questions in the self-study help colleges determine the following: (1) if the institutional mission includes or should include educating international students; (2) if or under what conditions the college should offer scholarship, financial aid, or work study incentives to those students; (3) if a distinction should be made between students studying under the auspices of the federal government and independent students; (4) if the college should recruit international students; (5) if the presence of international students might result in reduced access for other students; (6) what the optimal number of international students might be; (7) the suitability of educational practices and faculty; (8) the desirability of using international students to maintain programs that might otherwise be closed due to low enrollment; (9) the acceptability of providing international students with skills that they might later use in economic or even military competition against the United States; (10) if student services should be required to bear the extra costs of services for international students; and (11) if international athletes should be awarded scholarships. Contains 27 references. (BCV)

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Clarifying Institutional Policy Toward International Students: A Community College Self-Study Model

submitted by

Sara B. Pfaffenroth
County College of Morris

Issues of Education at Community Colleges: Essays by Fellows
in the Mid-Career Fellowship Program at Princeton University

Princeton University
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Prof. T. Rabb

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Clarifying Institutional Policy Toward International Students: A Community College Self-Study Model

In 1982, The American Council On Education issued committee findings titled Foreign Students and Institutional Policy: Toward an Agenda for Action which pointed out that among the world's leading host countries for international students, the United States was the only country which had no centralized policy guiding the influx of such students, a situation which thus by default located policy decisions at individual educational institutions. In 1983, the Institute of International Education in New York published a report funded by the Mellon Foundation titled Absence of Decision: Foreign Students in American Colleges and Universities: A Report on Policy Formation and the Lack Thereof. In it, authors Crauford Goodwin of Duke and Michael Nacht of Harvard explored the prevailing attitudes and practices at a number of American campuses. More than a decade later, in 1995 when more than 425,000 international students attended American institutions, most community colleges, which by then were enrolling increasingly large numbers of such students, had not yet seriously addressed questions of why and how their institutions should be involved with such students. Since national policy is absent, and since most institutions have likewise not addressed policy to this topic, this paper proposes a model self-study to guide community colleges in considering such questions and formulating policy based on the study results.

In their opening pages, researchers Goodwin and Nacht defined policy as a "method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions" (vii). What they found in the course of several hundred interviews conducted with college administrators and staff members closely connected with international students

was that their definition of "policy" implied a degree of coherence and forethought which they were unable to observe at most of the institutions they visited (vii). Instead, they heard words such as questions, problems, opportunities, challenges. Colleges had been aware that an ever-growing body of international students existed, but since that number was such a small percentage of the overall student body (except in some technical/scientific fields such as engineering), there was no sense of urgency to deal with it until a tightening American economy raised taxpayers' voices about the increased costs of education. Those voices were heard by lawmakers who in turn began to commission studies exploring the economics costs and benefits of educating foreign students at public institutions such as community colleges. Even when those studies showed that the presence of foreign students actually generated jobs --100,000 jobs in 1995-- and pumped up the American economy --by \$7 billion in 1995-- (Henry D7), there remained a strong anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative action backlash. During several political campaign years, this backlash fueled social concerns such as foreign students "taking the places" that should have belonged to American students, especially in the sciences, the health fields, and even athletics (Brugge 5). It is at this political and emotional stage that many community college personnel now find themselves having suddenly to examine their institutional goals and objectives vis a vis international students. The "coherence and forethought" which should guide policy formation are suddenly threatened by an economic, political, and social climate which makes an objective examination difficult and potentially unpopular.

Although their research took place more than a decade ago, perhaps the work of Goodwin and Nacht can be of use in providing some distance from which current college personnel may more safely explore the policy-making process. During their visits to campuses, they were able to distinguish eight reasons why

those they interviewed were interested in the subject of international students:

1: Some were attempting to construct a new vision of U.S. colleges or universities as institutions which had jettisoned their provincialism and now hoped to introduce students to a multinational world in which understanding and interaction with other cultures resulted in expanded markets, world peace, and less geographic and political isolation for the United States. Exactly what role their foreign students would play in such transformation was seldom spelled out, however (1-2).

2: Some decried the unplanned increase of foreign students at their institutions because they were spiteful and xenophobic, but most cries came from concerned individuals who believed their institutions were inadequately prepared to deliver appropriate services to foreign students (2).

3: As demographics affect domestic demand for higher education, some educators choose to look abroad for students who might fill their classrooms and dormitories (2).

4: Fluctuations in the U.S. economy produce shifts in geographical movement as well as shifting fashions in career fields such as engineering and the humanities. Foreign students may help stabilize institutions (2-3).

5: Some state legislatures move in haste against foreign students when there is a crisis in the treasury, when there is some revulsion against a foreign political situation, when there is a flood of refugees, when there is a public outcry about domestic students losing admissions spots to foreigners, or in response to complaints about unintelligible teaching assistants. Quotas and special fees are used as punitive measures for both institutions and foreign students (3).

6: Institutions sense a lack of coherent national policy, adding to confusion and crossed signals on the local level. The USIA and USAID funding has been cut back drastically, yet a generous visa policy is still in place; The Simpson bill would

require a "return home" period of three years for highly trained professionals, yet American research firms and universities are desperate for the skills that the new Ph.D.'s and technicians could provide (3).

7. Some seek to improve worldwide understanding, instill good feelings toward the U.S., export democracy, and strengthen the country's ability to compete effectively in the world's marketplaces. (Note the Soviet Union's decades long open policy of welcoming huge numbers of promising students to its Moscow universities as a clear route to exporting Communism to third-world countries (3-4)

8. Some are bothered by the inconsistencies of how a foreign student presence collides with a wide range of other issues including bilingual education, open-door admissions policies, urban-rural tensions, and differential funding. (4)

The concerns and interests raised by these eight groups, however, do not translate into a unified voice pressing for a clear policy which can guide either government agencies or local institutions. Goodwin and Nacht found that most state governors took a larger and more generous view toward foreign students than did state legislators. This appears to be true at the national level as well. In a Montana speech last June, President Bill Clinton said:

"I spoke at the Air Force Academy commencement today down in Colorado Springs. There were 11 foreign students graduating from the Air Force Academy. All of our service academies take a limited number of students every year from other countries. And it's a great thing for our country. They go back home, they do very well, builds a lot of good will. The number one student this year was from Singapore. And when he stood up to be recognized, all those red-blooded American kids that he scored higher than clapped for him and were proud of him. That is the American way. They did not feel threatened by that." (Clinton 7)

This kind of remark hardly provides a clear policy direction, especially when California citizens are voting in two consecutive elections on issues of immigration and affirmative action, or Congress is debating a stringent Simpson bill which would gut engineering and technical departments around the country (Davidson). When medical schools refuse to train foreign physicians (Schmidt), Alabama

community colleges rescind athletic scholarships for foreign athletes (Blum), Illinois technical high schools drop all foreign students in response to American parental objections (Banas), or even New Jersey's own County College of Morris discontinues international tuition-assistance scholarships (Most), the message, in effect, is that financial and political considerations are either becoming policy or are replacing policy.

At the local levels, popular perceptions and misconceptions also cloud the issues. Labor fears: Should we be educating our economic competitors and taking jobs away from Americans? Parents fear: Aren't foreign students taking away classroom spots from our American kids? Racism: do we want all these Asians in our country? Taxpayers: Why shouldn't we make foreign students pay more? After all, they are not paying taxes. Isolationists: Why should we be educating the world? Let's spend that money on educating our own young people. Faculty: How much extra attention and time will these foreign students need from me? Administrative policy makers: What is an optimal number of foreign students for a campus? Does an institution which is already in a cosmopolitan setting really gain much increased diversity from a foreign student presence? Internationalists: Are we unfairly causing "brain drain" in some nations? Are we successful at helping U.S. educated students to return home and use what they have earned to benefit their own cultures? Especially women students? Foreign student advisers: Do we do enough to combat the poverty and isolation that culture shock imposes on students? (Goodwin, and Nacht 5-12)

Nor does guidance come from the latest federal higher education reform effort -- the Higher Education Act of 1992 -- which is described in a Journal of Higher Education article as a policy reorientation reflecting the fragmented institutional structure and the pluralistic culture of American higher education . Instead of providing direction in the issues of foreign students and faculty, the act

defers to institutions who must wrestle with the issues on their own (Hannah).

When Goodwin and Nacht explored the lack of policy at the institutions they researched, one prevalent view from high-level administrators was that there is virtue in non-policy because 1) too much xenophobia lurks just below the surface in the U.S. and the unscrupulous can easily exploit it; 2) the complex give and take which occurs at universities is not easily understood by those beyond the campus, and creating and publicizing a policy would invite too much attention from legislators, alumni, community members, etc. 3) there is no urgent situation which requires a solution. At some other institutions, everyone assumed that a policy was in place and that it had been devised by some other office in the institution, or by some state or national priorities. Still other institutions questioned whether a policy could ever be formulated when the foreign student area was so inextricably embedded in larger questions of overall institutional behavior, e.g. the concept of "demand" as a defining force in institutional decision-making, especially in recent decades (26-29).

Among many others, American diplomatic leader Henry Kissinger has called for inquiry into policy formation by pointing out that our attitude toward and treatment of foreign students often has lasting global consequences. Witness the case of Kwame Nkrumah who after his role as founding father and president of the new nations of Ghana, wrote about his years facing poverty, exhaustion, and racism at Lincoln College in Philadelphia. (Herbert 68.) Or consider the positive economic impact which a U.S. educated Asian business executive could have in the global marketplace. A Newsweek article estimates that between one-third and one-half of the world's top positions in politics, business, education and the military will be held during the next twenty-five years by the international students now attending U.S. colleges and universities, and yet studies show that more than 40% of such students feel "unwelcome, lonely, and isolated" at their

colleges. (Rentz 10) If Americans wish to maintain a global presence and global influence, it is time our institutions of higher education think seriously and systematically about what they want to do with their international students.

In undertaking a self-study process which might lead to policy decisions, the issues clearly fall into three categories: the economics of educating foreign students, the socio-organizational issues of students on American campuses, and the educational issues (Goodwin and Nacht 34). By considering the following questions, community colleges will be able to probe how these categories of issues apply to their individual institutions and formulate appropriate policy.

Self-Study Model

1. Does the community college mission include educating international students? Should it?
2. If the mission and goals of a community college are construed to include the education of international students, should such colleges offer participation in college programs such as scholarship, financial aid and work/study incentives to some or all of those students? Under what conditions? How much? For what period of time? Should that aid be applicable to ESOL non-credits?
3. Should international students studying under the auspices of federal government agencies such as the USIA and USAID be awarded different treatment than those who apply to study at community colleges through their own initiative and contacts? i.e. should USIA/AID exchange students automatically be awarded in-county tuition rates since their costs are already being born by U.S. taxpayers?
4. Should a community college actively recruit international students? Should it, for example, run a recruitment ad in an international magazine or have an admissions officer join an overseas recruitment tour?
5. Even though community colleges are traditionally open-access institutions, can the presence of international students nevertheless result in diminished access for American

students?

6. What is the optimal number of international students an institution should enroll either overall or in particular programs? Should there be quotas limiting the number of students from particular regions or countries?
7. Are our educational/curricular practices suitable for international students and our faculty prepared to teach them?
8. Is it desirable/ethical to use international students to shore up programs, particularly high cost technology and engineering programs, which would otherwise be closed down for lack of enrollment?
9. Is it wise to provide international students with skills which they might then take back to their homelands and perhaps use in economic or even possibly military competition with the U.S.A.?
10. Should student services be required to bear the extra costs of providing special services to international students?
11. Should international student athletes be awarded athletic scholarships?

In addition to and preferably before generating answers to the above questions, institutions will also need to do an audit of the international students currently on their campuses. Where did they come from? How did they hear about the college? Who are their sponsors? What are their motives in studying here? In what programs are they enrolled? How successful are they academically? To what extent do they participate in and contribute to the life of the college? What special services are provided for them? How much financial assistance is the college providing them? What do they do after they leave/graduate from the community college? Answers to such questions will help colleges see more accurately how policy decisions might impact their institutions.

Employing a self-study model such as the one above and involving broad

sectors of the college in discussions of the complex issues should help an institution clarify and isolate particular issues which have in the past remained unspoken or hidden on the campus. By including the results of the institution's audit of its existing international students in the discussions, community colleges should be able to wend their way through the complexities and formulate a policy which is responsive to the needs of the college, the students, the community, and to international students. In some ways, this process should be easier for community colleges than for many large research institutions where international graduate students comprise a large portion of the research and teaching assistants vital to the functioning of such universities. And yet in other ways, the close relationship between community and college may mean that the local political and social environments have more direct impact on college policy and may thus shadow the decisions and policies of the community colleges.

Some of the results of this inquiry process are predictable: community colleges will no doubt discover the validity of those national studies which show how the presence of international students actually generates jobs and income directly and indirectly for an institution and its community. The energy, enthusiasm, and commitment level of international students will feed the campus social and student activity climate. The broad interests of international students in global affairs will provide support for courses and programs, including languages and area studies, in the humanities and social sciences, and their skills in technical and scientific fields will provide an opportunity for many community colleges to offer higher level courses in those areas than might otherwise be possible. Colleges will find themselves able to forge relationships with institutions abroad when a significant number of their international students and faculty can serve as a bridge between academic administrations. American students will learn to work and interact with students from diverse backgrounds even when there may be

little diversity in the service area of the community college.

Whatever the situation at a particular institution, the number of international students coming to American community colleges continues to rise, suggesting that there is a certain urgency in facing the matter of self-study and policy formulation. Holding a serious self-study inquiry can benefit a college and yield a valuable planning document that can guide institutions into the next century -- a century which promises to be even more "global" than this one has been.

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